

ACT ONE

Vast empty area, oval shaped.

Audience surrounds it, standing, sitting, but does not promenade.

House lights down, followed by stage lights to complete darkness.

Slowly, a light builds and finds a circle of fifteen figures shrouded in grey, like monks, hooded, faces unseen.

They are CHORUS and scene-changers, the sound-makers and providers of light, the controllers of the traffic, of characters and crowds on stage, the pointers of their destiny.

The circle faces inwards.

CHORUS: All things tire of themselves: the demagogue of his tongue, the revolutionary of his fervour, the singer of his song, the sower of his seed.

[They bend forward as though to hide what they do.]

Slowly, the light builds and builds and builds, until everywhere is bathed in a dazzling, ethereal luminescence like a portent of some millennial event.

The CHORUS step back and away.

In the centre of the space can be seen a single, magnificent red rose in a beautiful ornate 'art nouveau' vase, and alongside it a fresh plaited loaf of bread.

The light fades, slowly, slowly, to complete darkness again.

Light picks out BRENDA, a married woman who keeps a diary. She sits at an old desk, obviously chosen by her with love. Her position is permanent. Her diary entries are punctuation marks along the way.

Light picks out NARRATOR, aged around fifty-five, grey and slightly bucolic, standing in the centre where the rose and loaf were.

His is a nature by turns benevolent and fierce, reassuring and acerbic, bemused and angry. He is a restless and unpredictable personality who charms and challenges, flirts with and castigates his audience.

In his hand is the rose. He places it in his button-hole as we hear BRENDA read from her diary.]

BRENDA: 17th August 1964. We have been offered a new house in a new town called Basildon. New house, new town, new life! We will accept but I am terrified. On the other hand, the past is dead like a bowl of decayed fruit – the juices dried up, the aroma faded, the sweet taste gone. And I am tired . . .

[NARRATOR takes out a hip flask to drink from – an action he will repeat intermittently throughout.

As he drinks –]

CHORUS: All things tire of themselves. The heart of its sadness. The rose of its scent. The city of its dreams.

NARRATOR: Who are *they*? I know who I am. I'm the community drunk. People love a drunk. There's something honest about him, they think. He seems to have a sense of desperation so extreme that nothing will be held back. No inhibitions. That's what they say. Well – I've no doubts. A drunk is boring, selfish, self-centred, lachrymose, a ham actor, and there is nothing in the books to guarantee that honesty, inebriated or otherwise, equals intelligence. A drunk can be an honest idiot and frequently is, so let's not be sentimental about drunks.

[He drinks.]

CHORUS: All things tire of themselves.

CHORUS 1: Youth of its certitude.

CHORUS 2: Manhood of its bravery.

CHORUS 3: The lover of his passion.

CHORUS 4: The cynic of his sneer.

CHORUS: The rose of its scent. The city of its dreams.

CHORUS 5: The sower of his seeds.

NARRATOR: Not true! The sower never tires of sowing his seeds.

The most deep-seated instinct in people is to make things grow. Food, flowers, cities, the child in the womb, a work of art – from a seed! Explode! Pwuch! *[Imitates an explosion.]* A miracle! Who are you anyway?

BRENDA: 5th January 1965. Today we moved our worldly belongings into our new house and arranged them in the clean, bright, white painted rooms.

[Rain! The sound of rain!]

It has rained steadily since we arrived, churning up the mud of unmade roads. The mud here is like glue. I feel slightly uneasy and depressed, but that's probably tiredness. On the other hand, rain makes things grow, at least there is the blossom to look forward to. New house, new town, new life, new risks, new blossom. I hope it is just tiredness.

[Rain, rain, rain.

Light picks out another figure, RILEY. Old Cockney dressed in an overcoat, muffler, peaked cap, an umbrella in one hand, a plastic shopping-bag in the other. Sticking out of his bag is a bunch of red roses.

He approaches NARRATOR, beckoning him to come in close and share a secret.]

RILEY: 'Ere, 'ere! Come 'ere a minute. To save yer sweating.

[A long cautious pause. What can he want?]

The worst part of the dream is – that when I wake up, I find that Maggie Thatcher is still alive.

[Without bothering to wait for a response, he shuffles away to the other end of the space, where he stops, as though in reverie.

Sounds of high winds. A gale is blowing up, slowly, to become a violent storm.

The CHORUS flash lightning, rattle thunder.

The storm howls. The three figures, each in their different worlds and time, stand/sit facing away from each other, listening, thinking, remembering.

The storm dies. Bright sunlight takes over one half of the space (not the same as the first ethereal light). It will gradually take over the whole space, chasing away the dark storm clouds.

Before this happens, a rainbow appears. A hologram of lights traverses the theatre's interior.

Five KIDS between the ages of eight and eleven run on near to where RILEY stands. They're dressed in clothes of around 1914/18.

Because one of them, 5TH KID, stands with his back to RILEY, we know he is RILEY as a child.

They are staring in wonderment and silence at the rainbow.

Sighs, exclamations, awe. Nothing raucous. Then –]

1ST KID: I can see red and orange and yellow . . .

2ND KID: I can see green and blue and violet . . .

3RD KID: And what's the other?

1ST KID: What other?

3RD KID: I can count seven colours.

[Pause.]

4TH KID: I think it's called indigo.

[More sighs and exclamations.]

Where we come from, down Stepney way, there was once a rainbow stretched from Spitalfields Church to Shoreditch Church.

1ST KID: Where d'yer think this one stretches from?

2ND KID *[working it out]*: It stretches from . . . Langdon Hill to . . . Barstable Hall.

[Long pause.]

5TH KID *[significantly]*: I know where Barstable Hall is.

[Without anyone saying anything, just an exchange of daring, audacious looks, they have reached an agreement.]

Come on then. Let's find it.

[With a whoop of 'YEAHHHHHH!', they rush towards the other end of the space.]

Halfway across, from different sides, two groups of three other KIDS appear and ask –]

KID 1: What's up?

KID 2: Where you going?

5TH KID: To find the end of the rainbow. Coming?

[With another whoop of 'YEAHHHHHH!', some dozen KIDS run off.

Silence. Then –

Rain again, rain, rain, rain!]

BRENDA: 14th April 1965. I have settled the children into school.

Bluehouse County – evocative of gentlemanly sports. It is a low, sprawling collection of boxes set in the middle of several flat, windy fields. There seems to be another estate of houses being built behind it, ugly and grey like blocks of cement. I wandered back along the Link, woodland on one side and a tangle of undergrowth and trees on the other. What a pleasure to find a part of Basildon that isn't neat and clinical.

[From the corner where the KIDS disappeared, come a couple of very brisk, very gaudily but expensively dressed housewives of today, umbrellas up, pushing supermarket trolleys overloaded with groceries.

RILEY turns and shuffles towards them.]

RILEY: 'Ere, 'ere. Come 'ere a minute. To save yer sweating.

[They slow down sufficiently to hear him out, but never quite stop.]

The worst part of the dream is – that when I wake up, I find that Maggie Thatcher is still alive.

1ST HOUSEWIFE *[picking up speed]*: Silly ole bugger.

2ND HOUSEWIFE: Silly old sod.

1ST HOUSEWIFE: This town's full of silly ole buggers.

DAUGHTER: And silly old sods.

[2ND HOUSEWIFE takes a swipe at her daughter, who dodges out of the way.]

1ST HOUSEWIFE: From the old days.

2ND HOUSEWIFE [*calling back*]: You wanna watch who you accost like that.

1ST HOUSEWIFE: I like Mrs Thatcher.

2ND HOUSEWIFE: Don't know when they've got it good.

1ST and 2ND HOUSEWIVES [*together*]: Silly ole buggers! Silly ole sods!

[*They're off.*]

NARRATOR: They came as strangers to this town, from prefabs that lasted twenty years beyond their allotted time, with their broods, their steely eyes and high hopes, strangers in a rural midst. And once they were grateful for the warmth and friendliness of silly ole buggers from the old days. But now? Ah . . . now . . .

[*Movement! Energy!*]

The space becomes criss-crossed with GANGS and INHABITANTS. All, except members of GANGS, are holding umbrellas, rushing from somewhere to somewhere: home to work, work to home, from shopping, to shopping, pushing prams, pushing trolleys, carrying briefcases, tool bags, pulling children, muttering as though to themselves, sometimes hurling their words at
NARRATOR.

One young woman, INHABITANT 2, stands by a bus-stop (brought on by one of the hooded CHORUS).

All is very carefully orchestrated and choreographed for pace, movement and sound.

Only one group remains still, beneath their umbrellas, watching, bewildered and lost, as INHABITANTS and GANGS rush by in the rain.

They are an ASIAN FAMILY. New arrivals. Parents and three children. At their side, cases. In the hand of the girl, a bunch of red roses.

Movement! Energy!

INHABITANT 1: Depressing! Bloody depressing town. Nothing ever happens . . .

INHABITANT 2: Boring, boring, boring, boring, boring, boring, boring . . .

INHABITANT 3: Looks good and tidy, but underneath, cor . . .

INHABITANT 4: Wonderful town! Great little town! Keep your London, stuff your Paris, burn New York! Basildon for ever is what I say.

INHABITANT 5 [*exuberant, singing, dancing*]: 'I'm singing in the rain, just singing in the rain, what a glorious feeling, I'm happy again . . .'

INHABITANT 6: If I won the pools, I'd leave – quick as a wink . . .

[*A GANG from one area chase another GANG across the space, menacing and shouting –*]

1ST GANG: Stacies! Stacies! Stacies' lot! Stacies' lot! Stacies! Stacies! Stacies' lot! Stacies' lot! . . .

INHABITANT 7: Everyone comes from the East End, that's the trouble. They all look alike, dress alike, talk alike, think alike, joke alike, eat alike . . .

INHABITANT 8 [*and her eager brood of four*]: Fish fingers, baked beans and chips, that's what you lot get tonight.

BROOD 1: Meat pies! Jellied eels!

BROOD 2: Fish and chips! Egg and chips!

INHABITANT 2: Watery vegetables! Over-cooked meat!

BROOD 3: Sausage and chips!

BROOD 4: Hamburger and chips!

EVERYBODY: Chips! Chips! Chips! Chips! Chips! Chips! Chips! Chips!

[*Rain still. Rain, rain, rain!*]

The GANG who were chased chase back; it's their turn to shout and menace –

2ND GANG: Subway! Subway! Subway's lot! Subway's lot! Subway! Subway! Subway's lot! Subway's lot!

[*A 3RD GANG follow on, chasing yet a 4TH GANG. The air is filled with violence.*]

3RD GANG: Pitsea! Pitsea! Pitsea's lot! Pitsea's lot! Pitsea! Pitsea!
Pitsea's lot! Pitsea's lot!

[*And still a 5TH GANG chasing a 6TH GANG.*]

5TH GANG: Basildon! Basildon! Basildon's lot! Basildon's lot!
Basildon! Basildon! Basildon's lot! Basildon's lot!

INHABITANT 2 [*diminishing whatever glamour emerges from this ugly moment*]: Boring, boring, boring, boring, boring, boring, boring . . .

INHABITANT 9: You get used to the violence, you get used to it. That's the bloody trouble, you get used to any bloody thing!

INHABITANT 4: They took my mum and dad from the slums and gave them a palace. We grew up in paradise. Keep your London, stuff your Paris, burn New York. Basildon for ever is what I say.

INHABITANT 5 [*still singing*]: 'I'm singing in the rain, just singing in the rain . . . !'

[*Silence – but for the rain.*]

Empty – but for the ASIAN FAMILY standing mute, bewildered, abandoned.

RILEY wanders up to them.]

RILEY: 'Ere, 'ere. Come 'ere a minute. To save yer sweating. The worst part of the dream is that when I wake up, I find that Maggie Thatcher is still alive.

[*He shuffles to a corner but not out of sight.*]

ASIAN FAMILY move away.

Empty space.

The rain. The rain.]

NARRATOR: Strangers in their midst. Mark that, dearly beloved. I too came as a stranger to this place. Fought for it, schemed for it, dreamed for it, invested my best years in it. But I've a confession to make – I'm lonely here. There are no – poets here. Oh yes, one or two. There's always one or two, but mostly only makers of money. If I want to feel alive, emotion-

ally charged, inter-bloody-lectually stimulated, I have to escape to the bleedin' metropolis. Makers of money. Lonely.

CHORUS: All things tire of themselves. The storm of its turbulence. Words of their meaning. Evil of its tyranny. The rose of its scent. The city of its dreams.

NARRATOR: Who are they?

[*The rain has been dying out.*]

Stillness.]

BRENDA: 21st August 1965. Once back inside the house, loneliness lurks in the empty rooms. There are a constant stream of callers – offering to deliver milk, to clean carpets or to save my soul, but no one I can really talk to . . .

[*The light fades, fades.*]

The space is in darkness.

Suddenly – here, there – a glow, another, and another, and another, all on the outer band of the oval space. An assortment of old hurricane and tillie lamps has been lit. It's the early 1920s.

Four East End families, the PLOTLANDERS, have come to their plotland bungalows for the weekend. They are:

PLOTLAND FAMILY 1: NELL and BERT, their children FLO, ELSIE and JACK, and NELL's mother, GRAN.

PLOTLAND FAMILY 2: MAVIS, her children STAN and DORIS, and DORIS's betrothed, MICK.

PLOTLAND FAMILY 3: MAUREEN and ALF, their daughter MABEL.

PLOTLAND FAMILY 4: IVY and ERNIE, their son SAM and ERNIE's old AUNT GRACE.

(*Note: The 'children' should be played by young men and women, which is what they'll become.*)

A bungalow is delineated by its floor space, covered in furniture which the CHORUS pull on trucks into its space.

Each bungalow occupies a corner of the oval area, but leaving a lot of space between and in the centre.

In each household are flowers in vases. Roses – plus.

Everyone is engaged in a different activity. An evocation of the times!

Some are preparing food – peeling vegetables, rolling dough, cleaning fruit, stirring soup. Other activities are: ironing with heavy old irons, darning socks on a wooden mushroom, sewing net curtains, simple carpentry, polishing brass and cutlery, snobbing shoes and any activity which the cast can discover.

Cooking and the heating of the iron are done on paraffin stoves. All the implements are of the time.

Can someone be churning butter?

Dare anyone get into the tin bath, which is being filled from a drum of rain water, and have his back scrubbed?

The CHILDREN are involved in indoor games or pastimes: snakes and ladders, flicking cigarette cards, rolling marbles, reading comics, cleaning a bike, constructing a ball-bearing scooter, and any activity of the period which the youngsters in the cast can discover.

NARRATOR, restless, walks amongst them, looking in on their lives. Individual members of the families will come and talk to NARRATOR as though he were the interviewer, but they'll continue working at something. Living never ceases. Always something to be done.]

NARRATOR: They came by train from Fenchurch Street Station for weekends and summer holidays to get away from the noise and the grime of their East End streets, lured by offers of cheap plots of land.

BERT: Twenty feet by a hundred and sixty.

NARRATOR: Price?

MAVIS: Anything from £3 to £6.

ALF: We had our fares paid and we was given champagne by the landowners.

ERNIE: Plotlanders! They called us the plotlanders!

NARRATOR: They came to Dunton, Laindon, Little Burstead, Vange – I love the names of places – Pitsea, Nevendon, Fobbing, Lee Chapel. Sounds! Full of stories! Langdon Hills, Basildon, or Beorhtel's Hill, as it was known in Saxon times.

BERT: Used to be farming land. For centuries.

ALF: Poor quality, though.

BERT: Good for cereals. Heavy London clay. Yellowish.

ERNIE: Then they started importing cheap corn from America, didn't they?

BERT: Never mind the poor soddin' farmers!

NARRATOR: And between 1870 and 1880 the harvests were so poor that the poor soddin' farmers sold out to land speculators.

MAVIS: Harry Foulger and Thomas Helmore of Laindon.

IVY: James Humm and Robert Verty at Vange and Pitsea.

NARRATOR: Came the Boer War, the developers combined with the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway Company to auction plots. Played the old game of holding back land to keep up prices.

ALF: But our offers were still low.

NARRATOR: The main plots developed around Laindon and Pitsea railway stations. Inevitably! But some of the plotlanders became so addicted to fresh air and the dawn chorus that they braved muddy footpaths, substandard dwellings and bad sanitation to leave London and live here for good, look.

ELSIE: Not us. My family didn't come to live till 1942, halfway through the war.

NELL: But we bought the property in 1924.

NARRATOR: The stories begin. And they better be good!

ELSIE: My mother was an East Ender.

NELL: Born in Bow.

ELSIE: But my father, he was a Wickford man.

BERT: Came to London to join the Metropolitan Police force for security.

ELSIE: And one morning he said to my mother –

BERT: I'm going out to buy a field because if I can't get away from people one day a week, I'll go insane.

ELSIE: So my mum said jokingly –

NELL: Well, whatever you do, don't spend more than £240 because that's all we own.

ELSIE: He came back and he said to her –

BERT: I took you at your word, I've bought a four-acre field with a white bungalow and I only spent £250.

[*The other families applaud her story.*]

NARRATOR: They've all got stories. And they tell them to each other endlessly. I mean not earth-shattering stories, not dazzling ones about larger-than-life personalities and extraordinary deeds. Just little ones, about tiny deeds and small braveries by unextraordinary people.

NELL: I'm not sure I like your tone.

NARRATOR: I'm not sure what I think of your lives!

Wars come, wars go, revolutions in art that changed ways of seeing, revolutions in thought that changed notions of liberty, revolutions in science that took cameras to Saturn, and here's your old man spending his family's last penny on four acres of field to get away from people and grow cucumbers!

GRAN: I don't think I know what he's talking about.

NARRATOR: Soon someone will say, 'We're only simple, working-class folk.'

GRAN: We're only simple, working-class folk!

NARRATOR: 'Don't bamboozle us with your high and mighty ideas.'

MAUREEN: Don't bamboozle us with your high and mighty ideas.

[*Focus shifts to BRENDA.*]

BRENDA: 2nd December 1965. I walked the quiet streets again today. There seems to be no place where life can be watched, no railway sidings, no wharves, no rivers to gaze at. No park with ducks to be fed, no teahouse to congregate around, nothing within reach, just open green and windy fields or clean streets with boring bare lawns. A toy town made of building bricks where the people are put into the correct places and life is neat and well ordered.

[*Focus back to PLOTLANDERS.*]

SAM: My father was a shipwright.

NARRATOR: The stories continue.

ERNIE: Worked on the London docks.

NARRATOR: Always best to ignore the community drunk.

SAM: Around the year 1915 he heard about the sales from his mates. Land sales at Laindon.

ERNIE: Bought one half an acre for £18 15s, your grandfather bought another.

IVY: Eight plots each.

ERNIE: Twenty-foot frontage by one hundred and fifty feet deep.

IVY: In New Century Road.

FLO: £18 15s for half an acre was a lot in those days.

AUNT GRACE: In those days, see, you could pay off for any land you bought at 2/6 a week. Ten shillings a month. But if you got behind in your payments, you lost your freehold.

NARRATOR: Freehold! Remember that, dearly beloved. Freehold! Very important principle. There's a great rumpus gathering on the horizon over that principle. Mark it. Freehold! Strangers in their midst! Mark them!

ELSIE: Our four-acre field was overgrown with blackberry and hawthorn bushes except for a small area round our white bungalow, and whatever the weather, my father came down on his leave day and us kids would come down with our mum every third or sixth weekend.

GRAN: Came down on a Friday and stayed right through to Sunday.

ELSIE: And we noticed, my brother and sister and I, that the train was full of people doing the same thing. They'd come down with their little bundles of wood –

JACK: – mostly from fish boxes –

ELSIE: – tied up, slung over their shoulders or in their little Rexine shopping-bags, wood to build their bungalows.

NARRATOR: Bungalows built of fish boxes! Wonderful! From the slum dwellings of the East End, they built themselves slum dwellings in the Essex countryside.

MAVIS: They were not slum dwellings!

NARRATOR: Slum dwellings! Made out of fish boxes!

MAVIS: Some of them, maybe but –

ELSIE: Friday, they'd travel down with their fish boxes but on Sunday they'd all go back carrying produce from their gardens – beans, cabbages, cauliflowers –

BERT: – carrots, peas, parsnips –

ALF: – onions, lettuce, tomatoes –

NARRATOR: – and cucumbers!

IVY: And flowers! Bunches and bunches of flowers! All our own! Which we'd grown! Everybody loved growing things.

MAVIS: Call that a slum?

NARRATOR: An untidy, hotchpotch of development! Mushrooming like some Wild West town. Without a sheriff!

MAUREEN: We were pioneers! Frontiers men and women!

NARRATOR: 'I knew the place when Indians were still hiding in the bushes.'

MAUREEN: I knew the place when Indians were still hiding in the bushes.

ERNIE: There were twelve shipwrights in our road.

IVY: Only it wasn't a road, was it? Just pegs in the ground. No roads, no sewage, no gas, no water, no electricity.

NARRATOR: Frontiers men and women, see!

ERNIE: Our lighting, our heating, our cooking – all paraffin.

AUNT GRACE: On the old-fashioned Beatrice stoves. We cooked on the old-fashioned Beatrice stoves in wooden huts, never thought anything about the dangers.

MABEL: You'd sit round the Beatrice stove to keep yourself warm. One of my first childhood memories.

ERNIE: Paraffin! Four pence a gallon!

ALF: Where d'yer get your water from, missus?

NELL: Rain-water tank on the corner of the hut.

BERT: Where d'yer bath, missus?

MAVIS: In a tin bath in the kitchen.

NARRATOR: Charming? Charming!

ELSIE: We'd come down for these weekends and first thing we always did was to raise the flag and show everyone we were there!

NARRATOR: Well, it was their castle, wasn't it? They were like royalty, weren't they?

JACK: Next thing we did was walk right round our boundary.

GRAN: Your father did that. Right the way round, checking the fences and the posts.

NARRATOR: Property! Mark that. An Englishman's home is his castle. Property! Freehold! Strangers in their midst!

[Focus shifts to BRENDA.]

BRENDA: 14th April 1966. In the early hours of this morning, my pains began. We have no car or telephone and Basildon has no hospital, so a frantic figure ran through the darkness into the centre of town to summons help. At half past nine in St Andrew's Hospital, Billericay, our son was born. The one member of the family who really belongs to Basildon. The price for our ticket to the new life has been paid . . .

[Focus back to PLOTLANDERS.]

STAN: My dad died when he was forty-eight.

MAVIS: A young man.

STAN: Used to be general foreman bricklayer at Runwell Hospital and I used to work under him. I suppose I must've been about fifteen then, and I was sitting having me dinner with him at half past twelve, and by one o'clock he'd gone!

MAVIS: Thrombosis!

STAN: He'd just erected a mortuary slab in the hospital and he was the first to lay on it!

MAVIS: We managed, though.

STAN: We managed.

MAVIS: I was a jolly sort.

STAN: Right!

MAVIS: I used to love people's company.

STAN: Right! My dad used to go down to Southend dogs, he used to be one for the greyhounds, my dad, but he never used to like my mum going out. He used to be selfish like that.

MAVIS: Well, that's how it used to be that time of day, didn't it?

NARRATOR [*mocking*]: 'Well, that's how it used to be that time of day, didn't it?'

MAVIS: And I loved the Salvation Army.

STAN: And Dad used to laugh. 'You'll come home with one of them bonnets one night,' he used to say. He wouldn't stop her but he didn't like her going.

MAVIS: Well, that's the way people were that time of day. It was the Victorian times. He was the breadwinner of the family and that's how it used to be, didn't it?

NARRATOR: 'That's how it used to be, didn't it?' People will take anything for a quiet life. Employees will take it from employers, citizens will take it from politicians, wives will take it from their husbands.

MAVIS: Tell them, though, Stan. Tell them. Your mum did get to sing once with the Salvation Army.

STAN: It was outside the Five Bells Pub and she saw this man struck by lightning –

NARRATOR: – which cured him of his rheumatism.

STAN: – which cured him of his rheumatism!

NARRATOR: You can see my problem, can't you?

STAN: She swore it!

[*Focus shifts to BRENDA.*]

BRENDA: 9th October 1966. Everyone is asleep. I have been looking at the sky. The stars are very bright. They have looked down on towns and villages and people like me for ever. The sky is part of my past and my future. It has continuity. But have I?

[*Focus back to PLOTLANDERS.*]

MABEL: My mum used to make butter. In a churn. We had cows and we used to sell the new milk three ha'pence a pint and the surplus milk that was left over she got some big flat pans and next day, she'd skimmer cream off for the butter and sell what remained a penny a quart.

DORIS: Where did you keep your food?

MABEL: Not in a fridge, that's for sure. In a two-foot square box with perforated zinc sides and a door.

MAUREEN: And it hung at the rear of the bungalow exposed to the elements.

AUNT GRACE: Like our outdoor lavatory. *We* were exposed to the elements too. A timber shed with an ever-open window and Venetian door and a bucket on a concrete slab for which your dad made a hinged seat.

IVY: And the garden was big enough for the contents.

AUNT GRACE: And the garden was big enough for the contents.

ELSIE: After we'd come to live here for good, we got a pig.

BERT: Lived at the bottom of our garden.

GRAN: Instead of fairies!

JACK: Dad always fatted a pig every year to be killed in the autumn by Uncle Frank, who was a butcher.

BERT: He took half the fresh pork and *I* took the other half, and I had a big oak tub which stood that high where I salted and pickled its hands for six weeks in brine, my own brine, look, and it had to be turned every day, and then at the end of the six weeks, I'd send them to Luckin-Smiths at Chelmsford to be oak-saw dried.

ELSIE: And Mother made brawn and sausage from it.

GRAN: And the chidlins! Don't forget the chidlins!

ELSIE: The innards of the pig! And Saturday night we used to have them served for tea and if there was any left over, Dad had them fried up Sunday morning with his bacon.

STAN: When I was ten years old, I did two jobs.

NELL: Intestines! With bread and butter. Lovely!

STAN: A paper round and cleaning for a chemist's.

NELL: And it gave me enough lard to last me till the spring too.

ELSIE: Nothing was wasted in our house.

STAN: I used to be up at five o'clock in the morning, I used to be at Wickford Station at ten to six, I used to get all the papers off the first train from London to Southend, I used to go all round Swan Lane and all round the Gardens and then I used to have to be back at ten to eight to start the chemist job at eight, where I used to have to clean all the measures out, and

the scales which was all brass that time of day. And I had to sweep all three shops for them. And when that was done, I used to go home round quarter to nine just to have a quick breakfast, 'cos I had to be at school at nine o'clock. And there was no being late that time of day or you got caned.

[Focus shifts to BRENDA.]

BRENDA: 21st December 1966. I sit here writing this diary of my passing days and I wonder – what's the purpose? Wouldn't it be better to write about the past? Recapture the days of my youth? The days of dreams and roses? But I wouldn't believe myself. I don't trust memory. Better to record the days as they come. Instant pain, instant relief . . .

[A SPECTACULAR HAPPENING.]

A plotland bungalow is to be erected. The parts have been prefabricated elsewhere.

The grey-hooded CHORUS bring on the pieces.

BERT, ALF and ERNIE build it.

Music features strongly as the background to these final passages of reminiscence.

SAM: We lived in a new terrace house in Barking. 71 Keith Road. Six shillings a week inclusive. And in our back garden, my dad erected and bolted together the frame of our Laindon house.

IVY: He was a very versatile man, your dad. Could turn his hand to anything – iron, woodwork, joinery, bricklaying. And he could draw his own plans.

AUNT GRACE: And he finished every job he began.

[Music.]

MABEL: My dad worked on the railways and when it was foggy weather, he had to get his men out to man the line and he had to see they were well supplied with food and drink because those days were the days of the pea-soupers and when it came down, it came down!

MAUREEN: And I hated him being out in the pea-soupers, hated it! I was frightened and just hated it.

[Music.]

ELSIE: There on the farm, they had the most wonderful tree. These days, you'd tell your kids don't go near it but for us, it was a wonderland.

JACK: It had these great thick branches which had been hollowed out and we used to play families in it.

ELSIE: We had the dining-room, we had the sitting-room, we had the kitchen, the scullery, the bedroom and we'd play and play and it was fairyland, just fairyland.

[Music.]

The bungalow continues to be assembled.]

MABEL: They were a wonderful couple, my mum and dad. They loved each other deeply and desperately, they really did, and they gave us a wonderful, settled and safe childhood. It was summer all the time for us.

[When the bungalow will be completed, there will be a double celebration. DORIS and MICK are preparing to marry, dressing up in black suit and white gown.]

SAM: I remember that summers were warm, that we picked lots of bluebells in the Crown Woods, Langdon Hills, and whenever I smell blackberries, I remember all the blackberries we picked for jams and pies which my mum made.

MABEL: I remember we went gleaning, picking up heads of corn that was cut too short so they couldn't pick it up with the forks. Mother made up bags, which we tied round us and filled with the heads of corn to give to the chickens.

STAN: I remember we went wooding, picking up wood the wind had blown off trees. For the fires.

ELSIE: I remember my parents knew magic. We had a magic lantern and a horned gramophone and my mum played the piano and we sang a lot.

[Piano.* Song. Everyone sings.

After a first verse, they continue singing, but more quietly.

Against the background of quiet singing, focus shifts from singers to BRENDA.]

BRENDA: 14th February 1967. Today my world shattered into guilty fragments at my feet. My mother died and I wasn't there with her. If I had still been living round the corner when she collapsed, maybe I could have saved her, but I had moved to Basildon and left both my parents behind. The funeral was so sad and pathetically short. I wept silently. But tonight back in Basildon, I walked alone in the woods beyond the Link and howled like an animal into the quiet night air.

[Focus shifts to NARRATOR.]

NARRATOR: So, they came from London, strangers into the rural midst of villagers who had lived there for centuries.

NELL: Centuries!

NARRATOR: And were you made welcome by those villagers?

NELL: Some eyed us strangely, but yes, we were made very welcome. Everyone got to know everyone else: neighbours, shopkeepers, delivery men.

IVY: When we all fell ill once, the grocer missed us. Brought us a selection from his shop.

MAUREEN: Can't see supermarket managers doing that.

NARRATOR: Strangers made welcome. How many of us have been strangers at some time or other in our lives? And were we warmly received? And did we receive warmly?

The stranger in our midst! Freehold! Property! What, dearly beloved, is being woven here?

AUNT GRACE: I can remember that when there used to be a wedding, the best man used to stand at Laindon Station platform, he used to wait for the London train to pull in, then he used to tip the driver to sound his whistle on his way to London. The newly-weds used to board the train, it used to

* In the Basildon production an actor was able to play an accordion.

go off and the whistle used to ring out cock-a-doodle-do! Cock-a-doodle-do! All the way to Dunton and beyond.

[Music. BRIDE AND GROOM pose for a photo – one of the sepia ones.

Train whistle: 'Cock-a-doodle-do! Cock-a-doodle-do!'

Beer and celebratory cries as the bungalow (completed) becomes the train which is pulled away by the hooded people in grey, the MARRIED COUPLE on it.

PLOTLANDERS freeze.]

BRENDA: 10th May 1967. I perform all the normal functions of living as if I were still alive, but inside I have died a death. How I wish I had someone to talk to. I am beginning to hate this new, self-contained life in this new, self-contained town. Basildon, Basildon, bloody Basildon!

[The dozen KIDS chasing the end of the rainbow appear, still searching, but now dressed as in the 1930s.

Halfway across, they again encounter two more groups of three who come at them from different sides to ask:]

KID 3: What's up?

KID 4: Where yer going?

5TH KID: To find the end of the rainbow. Coming?

[With an even louder whoop of 'YEAHHHHHHH!', the enlarged battalion of youngsters continue their quest.

Into the space now.

AN AMAZING SIGHT. THE BALLET OF STREET GAMES.

These games must be expertly carried out by children who have been specially selected and who have trained to be spectacular.

Spinning tops: Those coiled in string and flung to the ground; those flung to the ground by a whip; those spun and thrown high from string between two sticks. The tops are brilliantly coloured so that when they spin, the floor is ablaze.

Skipping: Breathtakingly fast and rhythmic skipping such as is not seen today. Individuals and groups.

Ball games: Bouncing it under legs with one arm behind back, and many such difficult feats from the past which I've forgotten.

The whole to be carefully choreographed.

During the previous time JACK has been putting on an army uniform, a portent of the cataclysm to come. As the children play their games, he wanders among them, waving goodbye, picking up a small one for a final hug.

Towards the end of the Ballet of Games, come the growing sounds of war.

Siren. Planes. Bombs.

The children stop their games. Look up. Gather their toys and run off screaming.

The remaining PLOTLANDERS form a tableau of fear.

Anti-aircraft guns. Fire engines. Explosions. A cacophony of terrifying sound.

Against the background of on-going war-sounds, the men relate war experiences in tones of distress.]

RILEY: I can remember, in 1937, couple of years before war broke out, I went to work at Shell Haven, loading boats. And what were we loading? Pitch! The Germans were building autobahns and we were sending all the pitch over to them. Used to be put in five-gallon barrels which were stored till the German boats come in and then for about four or five days, we'd load the boats and off they'd go to build Adolf's autobahns. And I could never understand why they couldn't see what he was doing. They knew he was preparing for war, but they never done anything about it, look!

NARRATOR: Well, he talks like that now. Hindsight, it's called. Very clever people are with hindsight. But ask him, would he have gone on strike to stop the rearming of Germany? Ask him, would he have agreed to sanctions to stop the rise of the Nazis über alles? Ask him, did he even bother to find out what the Nazi Party was all about! Ask him! Ask

him! I love the barrack-room lawyer mentality of the working class, don't you? Heartfelt, deeply felt ignorance! Nothing like it!

[The sounds of war continue. NARRATOR ducking all the time. Searchlights sweep the sky. Anti-aircraft blasts. Somewhere there is a flickering red of flaming ruins.]

SAM *[in great distress]*: My company helped to free Belsen and I got photographs to prove the atrocities what took place there. I got photographs! It was horrifying. We saw the incinerators filled with bones, we saw the gold they pulled out of dead Jews' mouths, we saw a heap of spectacles eight foot high. And I helped to bury the dead. You had to use bulldozers to dig the graves. There was one grave, well, it was about three quarters of a mile long and at the end of it, we put up a plaque saying 36,000 bodies lie here. 36,000!

NARRATOR: We don't believe you, do we?

SAM: Well, you better believe me 'cos I saw it.

NARRATOR: All fabricated lies!

SAM: I got photographs to prove it.

NARRATOR: A Jewish plot to justify taking land away from the Palestinians!

SAM: Oh well, I don't know about any of that.

NARRATOR *[in fury]*: 'Oh well, we don't know anything about that!'

STAN: But I know what the Nazis was like 'cos I was guarding a prisoner of war camp in Trieste. The German soldiers looked after themselves, see. Very efficient. Kept to the same discipline like as if they was still in the army. And we fed *them* proper 'cos they worked. Not the Nazis, though. We had 'bout forty or fifty of them and they were kept separate 'cos they refused to work. They spoke English, see, and they used to call us all the Bs under the sun. Well, they still wasn't defeated in their eyes, see. You'll never change our way of life, they said, you laugh now but we laugh last. I used to feel like putting a bullet through them. Terrible people. But the women was the worse. We had a lot of women SS, like the men, only worse.

You couldn't believe how they were. Brutal! Tear anybody to pieces with their hands. I mean – well – I mean – it's dreadful, war, and to me there's no cause for it. I mean I got no grudge against any foreigner.

[Sounds of war continue all the time.]

NARRATOR: But ask him, did he protest when the British government turned back refugees fleeing from the Nazi extermination camps? Ask him!

STAN: I mean, why can't everyone be friends in this world?

NARRATOR: Ask him, did he open his arms to the foreigner then? The stranger in his midst? Ask him!

[JACK is in uniform, writing a letter home.]

JACK: We may be winning, but you've still got to be careful, though. Never know where the snipers are. But I tell you this, Mum –

[Sister FLO takes over reading the letter.]

FLO: – when we get back, we're going to build our very own and golden cities.

[A rattle of machine-gun fire sounds especially loud.]

JACK falls dead.

*The CHORUS of grey-shrouded people raise him high.
Carry him round for all to see. They carry him off.]*

STAN: Why can't we all live in peace? There must be an explanation there somewhere.

NARRATOR *[as they're carrying JACK off]*: Oh, the innocence of it! Oh, the bewildered, uncomprehending naïvety of it! Well, yes! There is an explanation to it somewhere. Because life is a conflict of interests between the vain and the vain, the greedy and the greedy, the fanatic and the fanatic, and it's all sanctioned by the unthinking, the ill-informed, the pious, the lazy, the illiterate, the easily-incited-led-by-the-nose-flattered-and-fooled majority. Not us, of course. I'm not talking about you and me. We're not like that, are we? We read books, we talk

to one another, we travel, we entertain dissent, don't we? We applaud non-conformist, unconventional, unfashionable ideas, don't we? It's the others! Out there! Always the others out there, isn't it?

[The sounds of war seem to rise to a crescendo as though matching the NARRATOR's anger. And then – slowly – dies away.]

In their scramble to evade the bombing, the families have knocked over things. Created chaos. Now, wearily, they gather the pieces together.

*The MARRIED COUPLE are changing from their wedding clothes to everyday wear. As this takes place –
music – and the CHORUS.]*

CHORUS:

All things tire of themselves.
The demagogue of his tongue.
The revolutionary of his fervour.

AUNT GRACE: The singer of his song?

CHORUS 1: The singer of his song.

GRAN: The heart of its sadness?

CHORUS 2: The heart of its sadness.

CHORUS: Be glad. Be comforted. All things tire of themselves.

NARRATOR: Who are these people?

SAM: The longing for revenge?

MAUREEN: The tiny satisfactions of spite?

CHORUS:

All things, all things.
Not only hope but despair also.
The smile may fade
But the crying cannot go on.

NARRATOR: Will we ever know who they are?

NELL: The rose of its scent?

IVY: The city of its dreams?

CHORUS:

And silence too.
All things tire of themselves.

DORIS: And passion?

CHORUS: And passion.

DORIS:

How can that be?
How can such energy and joy come to an end?

CHORUS: It does. It does.

MICK:

How can that ever be?
My images are sharp and glowing.
My language is on edge.
My heart is high.
And all my nerves are ringing! Ringing!

CHORUS:

It can be!
Passion does tire of itself
As all things do
Be glad. Be comforted.

CHORUS 3: If confidence falters.

CHORUS 4: And holy grails fade.

CHORUS 5: Unhappiness wearies also.

CHORUS 3: The mocking wear their shrillness thin.

CHORUS 4: Contempt withers.

CHORUS 5: The sneer dissolves.

CHORUS:

All things! All things!
All things tire of themselves.

CHORUS 6: Childhood of its childishness.

CHORUS 7: Youth of its certitude.

CHORUS 8: Manhood of its bravery.

CHORUS 9: Evil of its tyranny.

CHORUS 10: The long storm of its turbulence.

CHORUS 11: The rose of its scent.

CHORUS 12: The city of its dreams!

NARRATOR: Does anyone know who the hell they are?

CHORUS:

And if madness follows
Will that too not tire of itself
As all things do?
Though no joy lasts
No pain lingers
Though the sower flags
The flower blooms
What tires of itself – revives!
Be glad. Be comforted.

[The low roar of the KIDS is heard offstage, in first gear.]

RILEY: 'Ere, 'ere. Come 'ere a minute. To save yer sweating.
The worst part of the dream is –

[He doesn't complete his sentence but moves sadly away.
Focus shifts to BRENDA.]

BRENDA: 3rd August 1967. My baby was playing happily one minute and the next he began to choke. Picked him up and thumped his back, but he kept fighting for breath and started to turn blue.

[The low roar of the KIDS is heard offstage, becoming louder.
Second gear.]

Put my fingers down his throat. Felt something hard and sharp. Pulled. He screamed and coughed blood but at least he was breathing. Covered him with a coat and ran in the rain to the doctor's surgery. No one there. Shops shut, telephone round the corner out of order. Returned in misery to the house. Badly needed someone to talk to. Knocked on house next door. No reply. Felt so alone. Must make friends and learn to fit in here if I am to survive.

[The roar of the KIDS grows as the enlarged battalion chasing the end of the rainbow appear, still searching but now dressed in the clothes of 1945.]

Halfway across, they again encounter two more groups of three who come at them from different sides to ask:]

KID 5: What's up?

KID 6: Where yer going?

5TH KID: To find the end of the rainbow. Coming?

[With an even louder whoop of 'YEAHHHHHH!', they continue their quest, but –

– this time, they don't leave the space. They run in slow-motion on the spot and are caught in strobe lighting, so that we can see the eagerness, the hope, the excitement of 'the quest' on their young faces.]

THE KIDS run and run and run, ever hopeful. NARRATOR moves among them.]

NARRATOR *[to KIDS]*: Go on! Run on my lovelies! Run! Go for it! Remember what the hooded ones said: 'Though the sower flags, the flower blossoms. What tires of itself – revives.'

[to audience] I know what you're thinking. Look at those kids, you're thinking. The innocence and the hope that something's there at the end of a rainbow, and all he can be is sour about it.

And listen to those lovely silly old buggers, you're thinking, with their romantic memories, their endeavours, reaching to clutch a share of the beauty there is in this sad old world – and all he can be is sour about it. That's what you're thinking, aren't you?

Well, nothing's simple. I'm sour and sweet by turns. I'm impressed and bored. Gloomy and hopeful. I can be tempted to hope like a virgin, then disappointed like a neglected spinster. That's how I am.

[to KIDS] Go on! Run! Don't give up! Take deep breaths and run! Run!

[to audience] I mean, how many people do you know who

make things happen? Most people are just not vivid, interesting. So, these plotland people, well . . . well . . .

[The glow on the faces of the KIDS, the shine in their eyes, seem to make him doubt his thoughts.]

On the other hand, I'll never forget a line in a poem by the Russian poet Yevtushenko. No one's completely uninteresting, he says, because:

When a man dies, there dies with him his first snow and his first kiss . . .

[NARRATOR takes the rose from his button-hole and hands it to a running KID. The lights fade on them running, running, running – ever hopeful.]

The last glow of light holds the image of the old man handing the young one his rose.

The CHORUS form a bowed circle of hooded grey around them.]

NARRATOR: I wish, I wish, I wish I knew who you were.

ACT TWO

From darkness, a burst into light, sound, movement.

The stage crowded with celebrating Londoners.

Noises of hooters and whistles.

Parties! Beer drunk from bottles! Champagne popped!

Singing! Dancing in the streets!

The war is over.

After some minutes, the crowds disperse, leaving . . .

The CHORUS of hooded forms, looming, ever present.

And the NARRATOR, drunk.

The PLOTLANDERS are dressed in the costume of the 1950s. Older.

The interiors of the bungalows have appropriate changes and additions. Fresh flowers.

NARRATOR: 1946! We'd won the war! The spirit of the times was 'Never again!'

[*The PLOTLANDERS take up the chant –*]

PLOTLANDERS: Never again! Never again! Never again! Never again . . .!

[*Which continues as background to –*]

NARRATOR: How excited we become with the glory and drums of war. Then our fathers and sons die and after the first euphoric spree, we remember them and victory turns stale and we stand in church or by gravesides and we swear with hand on heart, eyes up-turned to God – never again!

[*Chanting stops.*]

But time passes! A new generation! Youth becomes excited all

ACT TWO

over again because youth has no imagination and you can sell youth anything from third-rate music to third-rate wars.

[*Protest from PLOTLANDERS.*]

That's right. Dismiss me, shout me down. I'm just the community drunk.

Listen to them! The same voices – the same voices – first they loved him, then they swept him aside, the man who'd led them to victory, the old Tory with his cigar, poor old Winnie Churchill.

ALF [*imitating Churchill's famous speech*]: You can fool some of the people all of the time. You can fool all of the people some of the time.

EVERYONE: But you can't fool all of the people all of the time.

NARRATOR: No! But can you fool enough of the people for enough of the time? And anyway, it wasn't Winston Churchill who first said that!

[*Protest from the PLOTLANDERS.*]

NARRATOR: Yes, yes! That's right. Shout me down.

BRENDA: 25th December 1967. Christmas. My past has been left behind, closed like a chapter in a book. This new chapter has no substance yet, I feel as though I am floating with no anchor to hold me, no harbour to which I can return. I am one stranger among many in a strange land.

[*RILEY shuffles to the NARRATOR.*]

RILEY: 'Ere, 'ere. Come 'ere a minute. To save yer sweating. The worst part of the dream is –

[*Sound of the KIDS' roar off stage interrupts him. Their sound is in first gear.*]

Hear them? Hear that sound? *That's* the sound of a dream. Street kids. Ever-hopeful street kids. Street-wise they say.

NARRATOR: Street-bloody-stupid, more like. If you stay on your street corner, what can you know of life except what's on your street corner?

[The KIDS' roar goes into second gear.

The PLOTLANDERS take up chant again –]

PLOTLANDERS: Never again! Never again! Never again! Never again!

NARRATOR [over the chanting]: Never again! Away with the Tories, who'd let us in for the war in the first bloody place. Bring on Clem Attlee and the Welfare State! The Socialists would build the new Jerusalem.

CHORUS 1: A health service!

CHORUS 2: Equality for women!

CHORUS 3: Distribution of wealth!

CHORUS 4: Jobs for all!

CHORUS 5: Education for all!

CHORUS 6: New thinking!

CHORUS 7: New towns!

CHORUS: 1946! The New Towns Act!

[NARRATOR is ever perplexed by them. Each one he approaches to peer at or speak to backs away.

Meanwhile – sound of roaring KIDS enters third gear as they rush on, now dressed in style of the 1950s.

Once again, the even larger group are met halfway by two more groups of three.]

KID 7: What's up?

KID 8: Where yer going?

5TH KID: To find the end of the rainbow. Coming?

[With a renewed roar of 'YEAHHHHHH!', thirty kids rush off to continue their quest.

Three gavel knocks on a table. A meeting of four members of the Housing Committee of the Billericay Urban Council (BUC).]

CHAIRMAN 1: Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Ladies! This meeting of the Housing Committee of the Billericay Urban District Council is brought to order. First on the agenda – the New Towns Act. Here's how I see it. For some time, the state of

the Laindon–Pitsea area of the county has been causing concern. A large, scattered community has grown up, plotlanders they're called, and a situation has been reached in which most of the population in our district are living in substandard dwellings which urgently require water, sewerage, gas, electricity and roads. Installation of these services is our responsibility and – to put it bluntly –

BUC 1: We're broke!

BUC 2: Can't afford it!

BUC 3: A new town would generate rates –

BUC 4: – which would pay for the services.

CHAIRMAN 1: Right! Now, what do we do?

[Three gavel knocks on a table.

A meeting of four representatives from the East and West Ham Borough Councils (EWBC).]

CHAIRMAN 2: Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Ladies! This joint Housing Committee of the Boroughs of East and West Ham is brought to order. First on the agenda – the New Towns Act. Here's how I see it. As you all know, due to six years of war, two factors have contributed to the dire housing problems we both face: the destruction of property by severe bombing and the building of little or no housing due to labour and materials being diverted to the war effort.

EWBC 1: The East End is congested!

EWBC 2: We've reached bursting point, I'm warning you!

EWBC 3: One of those new towns would go a long way –

EWBC 4: – to ease congestion!

CHAIRMAN 2: Right! Now, what do we do?

[Both committees join and face the MINISTER OF TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING. He's dictating a letter to a secretary, MISS MATHIESON.]

MINISTER: To the Town Clerk, Billericay Urban District Council. What's his name?

MISS MATHIESON: Mr Alma Hatt, Minister.

MINISTER: I see you've had your hair permed.

MISS MATHIESON: It's the new style.

MINISTER: Looks very nice.

MISS MATHIESON: Thank you, Minister.

MINISTER: Dear Mr Hatt. As the person most responsible for arguing the claims for your district to be designated a new town area, I am happy to inform you that my ministry is granting provisional approval for the setting up of a new town with a 50,000 population to be called Basildon.

[Applause and hurrahs from COUNCILLORS.

A roar of 'NO - OOOOOO' from the PLOTLANDERS.]

BERT: What about our homes?

MAVIS: Our sacrifices?

ERNIE: Our livelihoods?

ALF: Our rights! Our rights! What about our rights?

NARRATOR: Here we go again. Conflicts!

BERT: You're denying us the fruits of old age.

IVY: You're taking away our friendly corner shops.

MAUREEN: Strangers will come!

MAVIS: They'll destroy our neighbourhood.

NELL: Disturb its spirit.

MABEL: And what will happen to our countryside?

NARRATOR: Conflict, conflict, conflict!

MINISTER: I have no desire to inflict injury or harm on anybody in the course of carrying out these proposals. But I must remind you - government has a duty and wider responsibility to help others. East and West Ham has one in four houses flattened by bombs, and some 20,000 people are on the housing list waiting for homes.

BERT: And what will happen to our freeholds?

NARRATOR: Freehold! Property! Strangers in our midst! Life is a conflict of interests, dearly beloved. Not only between the vain and the vain, the greedy and the greedy, the fanatic and the fanatic - but between the state and the individual. On my left - the individuals!

[Brass and drums.

Enter from all corners GROUPS OF PROTESTERS behind banners declaring:

DUNTON RESIDENTS PROTECTION
ASSOCIATION

LAINDON RESIDENTS PROTECTION
ASSOCIATION

BASILDON RESIDENTS PROTECTION
ASSOCIATION

VANGE RESIDENTS PROTECTION
ASSOCIATION

PITSEA RESIDENTS PROTECTION
ASSOCIATION

Men and women with sandwich boards declaring:

MPs DO YOUR DUTY

NO JUSTICE, NO FREEHOLD

WE FOUGHT FOR ENGLAND, NOW WE
FIGHT FOR FREEHOLDS

The bungalow with a man, MR BIRCH, astride its roof, rifle in hand, is pushed on again by the hooded circle of grey.]

MR BIRCH: Our resolution passed this day 14th September 1948:

'Compensation for property and land is grossly inadequate and bears hard on their owner-occupiers. The loss of freehold would be a heart-rending blow to those of us who have striven for years to acquire a small portion of their mother soil. We have built our own homes to free ourselves from the burden of rent and fear of ejection. By our thrift and self-sacrifice, we have placed ourselves beyond the need of the state's assistance. Are we now to be penalized by the state for our spirit of enterprise and public responsibility?'

[Roar of support from the PROTESTERS.]

NARRATOR: And on my right - the state. Minister of Town and Country Planning.

[Roar of boos from the PROTESTERS.]

MINISTER: Your enterprise was privately motivated, not publicly responsible. We must live with one another. No man is an island unto himself. It is in the public interest that the community and not individuals should hold freeholds. I want you to go away and think this out calmly and dispassionately.

[Protest. Protest.]

You have an opportunity of rendering service to tens of thousands of people like yourselves. I have spoken to hundreds from West Ham and East Ham and they are just living for the day when they can come here. Strangers in your midst. I want you to make them welcome.

[Protest. Protest.]

I warn you! People will come whether you like it or not because this is an area ripe for development. The real choice which lies before you is whether in the long run this town is going to be built in a proper planned manner and inhabited by people who make a real home of it, or through chaotic development, by people who will come in sporadic fashion to make quick profits from jerry-built houses.

MR BIRCH: But you're not even offering a fair price for my property!

[The two committees of Billericay and East and West Ham have joined as one to become the Basildon Corporation.]

Each of the eleven members holds a large card with a letter on it.

As the CHORUS speak, the cards are revealed one by one to spell out two words.]

CHORUS: In the beginning was the dream.

CHORUS 12: And the dream created the Corporation and the Corporation was without form and voice, and darkness was upon its face.

CHORUS 11: And the spirit of the dream moved upon the face of the Corporation and said let there be life and there was life.

CHORUS 10: And the dream looked upon the Corporation's life and saw it was good.

CHORUS: And the Corporation became God.

[The cards have spelt out BASILDON CORPORATION.]

The CORPORATION take over the circle of the hooded grey ones and surround MR BIRCH on his bungalow roof.]

CORPORATION: We offer you £500 for your house and land.

MR BIRCH: It's valued at £2,000.

[He fires a shot in the air.]

The circle retreats in fear.]

NARRATOR: Conflict! Conflict! The Corporation began to terrorize inhabitants to accept their offers.

[The circle regroups.]

CORPORATION: We'll offer you £750 for your house and land.

MR BIRCH: It's valued at £2,000.

[He fires a shot in the air.]

The circle retreats in fear.]

NARRATOR: The elderly became very frightened.

[The circle regroups.]

CORPORATION: We'll offer you £1,000 for your house and land.

MR BIRCH: It's valued at £2,000.

[He fires a shot in the air.]

The circle retreats in fear.]

NARRATOR: His case became a *cause célèbre* in the nationwide press.

[The circle regroups.]

CORPORATION: We'll offer you £1,400 for your house and land.

MR BIRCH: It's valued at £2,000.

[He fires a shot in the air.

The circle retreats in fear.]

NARRATOR: Families like him were holding up the building of recreation facilities for the new town. They were offered to Billericay and Brentwood instead. Divide and conquer!

[The circle regroups.]

CORPORATION: Our last offer, £1,750!

[MR BIRCH stands triumphantly aloft his bungalow as the hooded CHORUS of grey push him off amid hurrahs and applause from the PROTESTERS, who set up a chant, -.]

PROTESTERS:

BEORHTEL'S HILL SAX-ON
WE DON'T WANT NO BASILDON
BEORHTEL'S HILL SAX-ON
WE DON'T WANT NO BASILDON

[Against which -]

NARRATOR: So, we applaud! The hero! The individual who stood up for his rights, defended his castle, got the right price for his property. The state didn't understand and had to be taught - think about it - with a gun! And we approve! We applaud? Think about that, dearly beloved.

PROTESTERS:

BEORHTEL'S HILL SAX-ON
WE DON'T WANT NO BASILDON
BEORHTEL'S HILL SAX-ON
WE DON'T WANT NO BASILDON.

[And on and on - as background to NARRATOR's next speech.]

NARRATOR: Conflict! Conflict! Conflict!

'We have done this,' he said, 'in order to build our own home and free ourselves from the burden of rent and the fear of ejection.' Very moving! But thousands were homeless! So,

planned town or chaotic development? Beorhtel's Hill or Basildon? And where do *we* stand, dearly beloved? With the silly ole buggers and their romantic memories, their sacrifice? With the homeless of East London? Chaotic development *could* mean character, variety. Planned development *could* mean dull monotony. Think about it - dearly beloved -

[Chanting stops.]

- for here comes the biggest conflict of them all - the dream versus the reality.

[The space darkens.

Thunder - lightning -

- music of the spheres!

A light burgeons from above as though the heavens were opening to reveal God.

Unfortunately, God had engagements elsewhere but we have secured the services of angels, male and female, wings and all!

*The ANGELS sing.**

As they sing, the transformation takes place. The grey-hooded ones pull, one by one, the PLOTLANDERS' bungalows off-stage, amid gestures of protest.

In their place they wheel on, one by one, four huge models of the four most recognizable buildings of Basildon.

The new town takes shape before our eyes as it is being sung about.]

ANGELS:

And this was the dream.

Within twenty years

From the devastation of war

From the deprivation of slums

From the poverty, the poverty

A phoenix!

* In the Basildon production a choir of about twenty 'angels' were used.

From the misery, the misery
A phoenix!
And this was the dream.

And this was the dream.
Offices of glass
From the shadows into sunlight
From the night's fears into morning
From the dark myths and the squalor
A phoenix!
From the pavements into parklands
A phoenix!
And this was the dream.

And this was the dream.
Diversity!
Sing praises to diversity!
Sing high, sing low
Sing black and white
Sing brick, cement and stone.
Sing typist neighbour to the nurse
Sing doctor neighbour to the dustman
Sing library, church, theatre, school
Sing clinic, pub and swimming-pool
A phoenix! A phoenix!

And this was the dream
Which every citizen could boast
And all the world would marvel at
Sing Art
Sing Industry
Sing sweet contentment
And this was the dream.

[*The singing and music end.*

Sounds. Building-site sounds. Orchestrated sounds of pneumatic drill, petrol-driven rammer, the shovelling of gravel, the chug of tractor engine.

The town is being built.

These sounds fade into the background.

Stage empty except for the four huge models, the NARRATOR, RILEY, BRENDA and the CHORUS of grey figures.]

BRENDA: 24th May 1968. The town has no continuity. It has taken into its midst everything that couldn't be moved or destroyed. The sheer power of its newness and creation has overwhelmed any character that it might have built on. There are isolated pockets of resistance, but rather like the Indians in America – if they resisted too much, they were either killed or herded into small areas and forgotten; if they co-operated, they lost their identity. I have severed my own umbilical cord and must find my own nourishment in a town that seems to have none to offer.

[*Rain again. Rain, rain, rain.*

The ASIAN FAMILY reappear beneath umbrellas and watch the INHABITANTS who, as before, rush across the space, umbrellas up, pushing prams, supermarket trolleys.]

NARRATOR: So, the town was begun! Messily, but begun.

INHABITANT 1: Houses were built before roads and shops and social services. Bloody daft!

INHABITANT 2: There was a lot of mud and a lot of trudging.

NARRATOR: The first house was completed in 1951, the thousandth house in 1955.

INHABITANT 3: We had our own bathroom for the first time in our lives.

INHABITANT 4: We had a garden!

INHABITANT 5: Fresh air!

INHABITANT 6: Open spaces!

INHABITANT 5: They built paradise for us!

NARRATOR: Some of the protesters achieved their demands – a fair price! A freehold for a freehold!

INHABITANT 7: But they kept changing the master plan, didn't they! Public inquiry after public bloody inquiry!

NARRATOR: In 1964 it was agreed that Basildon could expand to take not 50,000 but 140,000 by the end of the century!

INHABITANT 8: But by 1983 there were 160,000 inhabitants, look! Seventeen more years till the end of the century.

NARRATOR: Ten thousand properties were knocked down –

INHABITANT 9: – protected buildings along with the rest!

NARRATOR: And – and here's the really interesting bit – as government and the times changed, so did principles change. Designated land bought for a pittance from the plotlanders was later auctioned off by the Basildon Corporation to private speculators at a huge profit. Ha! Freehold! Property! The stranger in our midst! The dream versus the reality! Conflict, dearly beloved! Conflict! Conflict!

INHABITANT 10: If the world had piles, it would be here!

INHABITANT 3: This is my town and I love it. It's got all *I'll* ever need in this life.

INHABITANT 2 [*at her bus-stop*]: It's a town waiting, this place. Bloody standing still and waiting.

INHABITANT 4: It's given me schools for my kids.

INHABITANT 11: There's a buzz but no explosion. One endless bloody fuse.

INHABITANT 12: And has anybody lit it yet? Has anybody even got a light?

INHABITANT 5: It's given me work, shops, clinics –

[*The 6TH GANG of youths chase the 5TH GANG across the space.*]

6TH GANG: Chalvedon! Chalvedon! Chalvedon's lot! Chalvedon's lot! Chalvedon! Chalvedon! Chalvedon's lot! Chalvedon's lot!

INHABITANT 13: It's a place to be born, a place to die, but it's no place to live!

INHABITANT 3: I tell you this, mate. Basildon has a future in Europe like no other.

INHABITANT 4: Shopping centre, sports palace, industry, the arts – you name it, we've got it.

INHABITANT 2: It's all money, isn't it! Work harder! Build bigger! Buy more! Money, money, money, money, boring, boring, boring, boring, boring!

[*The 4TH GANG chase the 3RD GANG. This time more stylized – like a ballet movement, moving slowly to the rhythm of their own chant –*]

4TH GANG: AL-CA-TRAZ! AL-CA-TRAZ! We're the gang from AL-CA-TRAZ!

INHABITANT 2: Boring, boring, boring, boring . . .

INHABITANT 8: You get used to the violence, you get used to it. That's the trouble, you get used to any bloody thing.

INHABITANT 5 [*exuberant, singing, dancing*]: 'I'm singing in the rain, just singing in the rain . . .'

[*Silence.*]

[*Empty stage, except for the ASIAN FAMILY.*]

BRENDA: 19th August 1968. The bulldozers have moved into the woods on the Link. They are flattening the trees and destroying the wild life. A housing estate is taking their place. I shouldn't mind, really, after all I have a house, so why do I begrudge others the same opportunity? I shouldn't mind, but I do. How difficult it is to welcome the stranger into your midst, but welcome them we must or die.

[*NARRATOR walks round and round the ASIAN FAMILY.*]

NARRATOR: Conflict! Property! Freehold! The dream versus reality! The stranger in our midst.

MR PATEL: At first Amin threw out only the British Asians from Uganda.

MRS PATEL: We heard about it on the radio and TV.

MR PATEL: Ninety days to sell our property and make our arrangements. Ninety days! We were promised safety and fair dealing but –

MRS PATEL: – but not all promises were kept, were they!

MR PATEL: Then in 1972 Idi Amin –

MRS PATEL: Idiot Amin we used to call him.

MR PATEL: Quiet, woman. Idi Amin visited Gadaffi, who promised to open a bank in Uganda if he threw out the Israelis.

MRS PATEL: The Israelis! Who were building vital roads and factories for Uganda!

MR PATEL: Will you please let me tell the story?

MRS PATEL: Are men stupid, tell me, are men stupid or not?

MR PATEL: Enough, Farida. Then he visited Bokassa in Central Africa, who gave him the idea to throw out the Germans and all the Ugandan Indians as well. Africa should be only for blacks, he said.

MRS PATEL: Stupid? Answer me! And we keep giving them such responsibility, *such* responsibility.

MR PATEL: And with Amin came the soldiers out of the barracks, crying, 'The Indians are milking the cows.'

MRS PATEL: Soldiers! The stupidest of the men are made soldiers. The ones who can't do anything constructive in life, they put them in uniform to destroy life!

MR PATEL: I was kept in prison for two days and I could hear the screaming from the torture.

MRS PATEL: Drunk and illiterate!

MR PATEL: They ripped off finger-nails and put salt there.

MRS PATEL: And the violations? The violations? Tell them about the violations!

MR PATEL: On the way to the airport, I saw bodies of men, women and children floating in the water.

MRS PATEL: He had brain damage. The man had brain damage from being a boxer in the army. His own soldiers joked about it. And they made him president of the most beautiful country in the world!

NARRATOR: When the full scale of the problem had been gauged by the Conservative government, they made their position very clear.

[The voice of the Prime Minister, Edward Heath, is heard as if on the radio.]*

PRIME MINISTER'S VOICE: Those who have been forcibly ex-

* Edward Heath *did* record this speech, which he rewrote himself.

pelled from Uganda are British citizens. Your government is determined to honour its obligations towards them. We shall not fail in our responsibilities towards our fellow citizens.

Accordingly, I have asked each local authority to take in at least five families. In this way the burden on each one authority will be kept to a minimum.

Arriving families will be met by the immigration authorities, who will deal with the necessary formalities as quickly and as sympathetically as possible. Special reception teams will also be on hand at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stanstead airports. These will be comprised of volunteers from organizations such as the WRVS, the Red Cross and the St John's Ambulance Brigade. Altogether, forty-eight – note that – forty-eight organizations have offered to help.

[Voice fades.]

The CHORUS in grey surround the ASIAN FAMILY and walk in a circle round them, chanting.

NARRATOR, still bewildered as to who they are, walks around them in the opposite direction, hoping for a clue as to their identity.]

CHORUS:

All things tire of themselves
The demagogue of his tongue
The revolutionary of his fervour
The singer of his song
The sower of his seed
The rose of its scent
The city of its dreams.

NARRATOR *[thinking he understands them at last]*: The city of its dreams! The rose of its scent and the city of its dreams! *[to the ASIAN FAMILY]* They're telling you too! I don't know who they are or where they come from, but they're also telling you. You think you've come to a city of dreams, don't you? Basildon! A town of working-class strangers taking over from plotlanders who were themselves working-class strangers.

Basildon! A town built for the disinherited, the slum-dwellers, the bombed out! Basildon! A phoenix from the ashes! A town of pity and dreams! And what happened?

[Two men appear. They are COUNCILLORS of the time.]

NARRATOR: We won't name names. We'll call you Dave.

DAVE: And we'll call you Tom.

NARRATOR: And they were both from the same political party. Labour councillors of Basildon!

DAVE: You never understood my arguments.

TOM: I understood them right enough.

DAVE: I *wanted* us to house those Ugandan Asians. I wanted the people of Basildon to welcome the strangers into their midst, but gently. Gradually.

TOM: There was no time. It was a crisis. These people were exiles. They'd lost everything.

DAVE: If you want to get emotional, let me remind you of the mother of two in a caravan with bronchitis and an ulcer. What would she have said to see an Asian family just arrived moving into a new home she'd been told she'd have to wait for?

TOM: There was no comparison. We were talking about people some of whom had committed suicide, some of whom had breakdowns from which they never recovered.

DAVE: I understood the problem. I knew about poverty and suffering and the iron fist of a ruling class. I grew up in the East End, didn't I? All I was suggesting was that we stagger them on the housing list. Not allocate five houses off the top but put them fifth, ninth, thirteenth, like that.

TOM: The issue was a moral one, not a pragmatic one.

DAVE: And I'm telling you it was a racial one. Pushing Asians on top of the housing list and claiming priority for them was creating racialism. We still had people looking for jobs, children looking for schools, patients looking for doctors!

TOM: That's demagoguery! Absolutely unforgivable. To exploit genuine anxieties about jobs and social services in the face of human tragedy. The people of Basildon were capable of

understanding the urgency of the situation. We insulted their intelligence and their humanity.

DAVE: Did we, Tom? Did we?

NARRATOR: Did they? The Labour motion to house the five Asian families was put to the council, where they had a majority of just 5 over the 19 Tories and Residents in the Opposition. 26 for, 16 against.

DAVE: And I abstained.

TOM: You betrayed.

DAVE: Not my beliefs. I didn't betray them.

NARRATOR: Passions were high. Councillors raged and accused and counter-accused. The Labour group was split. One Labour councillor resigned and put himself up for re-election as an Independent in order to test the avowed intelligence and humanity of the people of Basildon. Did they want strangers in their midst or not?

DAVE: No! I'm afraid they didn't! He was re-elected. The voice of the people of Basildon! They did *not* want strangers in their midst!

TOM: But did we always listen to 'the voice of the people'?

NARRATOR: So encouraged by the people of Basildon, the Tories put another motion to the council.

DAVE: That in the light of the result of a recent election in Barstable West Ward showing clearly strong public feeling in the matter, that this council rescinds the decision contained in Resolution 3 of Minute No. 1972/1488.

NARRATOR: The Billericay Residents added an amendment.

DAVE: That this council agrees to the acceptance on the housing list of five Ugandan Asian families expelled by the Ugandan government but after one year's residence in the United Kingdom.

TOM: But we had to integrate those people at once! The problem was not going to be solved by keeping them waiting for a year or more. And where? In camps? Refugee camps in Britain? Our council had *always* housed people out of turn for reasons of dire distress. Five homes! Five! A small contribution towards solving an international problem. We were given the

chance to be magnanimous in the international arena and what did we do? Socialists! What did we do?

NARRATOR: Conflict! Conflict! Conflict!

The new motion was put to the vote. 22 for, 22 against. 5 Labour rebels voted with most of the Opposition and the Labour Chairman put his casting vote in favour of the resolution. The Socialist Group was defeated and Basildon said no to the stranger in their midst. Is it any wonder that heads had to roll? That rebels were expelled? And who was right, dearly beloved? Who represented the voice of the people? The comrades or the rebels? And if the rebels represented the voice of the people, should one always listen to that voice of the people? Conflict, dearly beloved, conflict, conflict, conflict.

[KIDS in first gear.]

RILEY: I remember that. Ashamed, I was. I remember that the Tory council down the road in Southend took in seven families.

NARRATOR: But the Basildon Corporation moved quietly in the background. The bloody old Corporation! Everybody's favourite villain! Under a certain Mr Charles Boniface, I remember.

[KIDS in second gear.]

Gave two fingers to the council and allocated five of their own homes to the Asians. Got it right for Basildon. Saved them; atoned for them.

[DAVE and TOM leave.

Thirty KIDS rush on. They're dressed in the style of 1989. Again, they're met by two groups of three more KIDS.]

KID 9: What's up?

KID 10: Where yer going?

5TH KID: We're going to find the end of the rainbow. Coming?

[With a roar of 'YEAHHHHHH!', they rush forward. But,

as at the end of Act One, they do not move off stage. Instead they run on the spot in slow motion.]

BRENDA: How difficult it is to welcome the stranger into your midst, but welcome them we must or die!

RILEY [to CHORUS]: 'Ere, 'ere. Come 'ere a minute. To save yer sweating. The best part of the dream is that when I wake up I can see flowers in my garden. Masses of them. I grow flowers, y'see. Always have done.

[And now the most extraordinary image of the evening. From every part of the theatre, the people of Basildon appear with flowers from their gardens. Not a few bunches in vases.

Not a few dozen. But hundreds. Vases full of cut flowers. Pot plants. All shapes. All colours. The floor is covered, every inch. The models are strewn.]

FULL CAST [singing]:

And this was the dream
Which every citizen could boast
And all the world would marvel at
Sing Art
Sing Industry
Sing sweet contentment
And this was the dream.

[The lights go slowly down on the running youths, who leave the 5TH KID to be surrounded by the CHORUS of grey. They bow to him in a circle as he runs and runs and runs to find the end of his rainbow.

The NARRATOR pushes through them and, as before, hands the runner a rose.

Then he turns to the hooded circle of bowed grey forms.]

NARRATOR: Who are they? If only I knew who they were.

[The last glow of light is upon the runner with a rose held triumphantly high in his hand. The bud opens up into bloom.]